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SUBJECT: SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS: PM ASSURES NATION ALL IS WELL

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11. (SBU) Summary: Prime Minister Manning spoke to the nation March 4 on the benefits of the Summit of the Americas and preparations for the event. The PM followed his televised remarks with a press conference during which he read a letter from President Obama confirming attendance at the Summit. The media event was part of the GOTT effort to increase enthusiasm for the Summit and to counter critics who argue the gathering is too costly, has too few benefits and is way behind schedule. End Summary.

12. (U) Prime Minister Patrick Manning held a televised prime time press conference March 4 to explain the importance of the Summit of the Americas and underscore that preparations are well in hand. The PM was accompanied by National Summit Coordinator Luis Alberto Rodriguez, Inter-Ministerial Summit Committee Chair Mariano Browne and Foreign Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon. In his prepared remarks, Manning argued that the Summit would increase T&T's stature and lead to increased foreign investment and improved security.

13. (U) Pushing back on critics, the PM said he had taken personal charge of administrative arrangements and that Trinidad was ahead of schedule compared to past Summits. Advance teams from other countries that had so far visited, he stated, had expressed satisfaction with preparations. On burden-sharing, Manning related that at least 600 CARICOM police and military would assist with security, while Barbados and the Bahamas would also provide offshore patrol vessels. Without specifying who he was talking about, the PM added that "other countries" would also send military assets.

14. (U) Following his prepared remarks, Manning read aloud President Obama's February 25 letter confirming his Summit attendance. Manning added that the U.S. delegation would arrive with a thousand people and 25 aircraft. He also mentioned Venezuela's 200-person delegation.

15. (SBU) Comment: Manning's media event was an effort to shift public commentary on the Summit in a more positive direction. Up to now, the predominant press line, echoed by many in the public and pushed by the opposition, has been that the Summit is too costly, has too few benefits and is way behind schedule. The GOTT plans to continue its public relations push (including highlighting at every turn that President Obama will be here), though it has started relatively late in the game. End Comment.

KUSNITZ